**The Worse Critic**

**June 21, 2001:** It had been three months since I volunteered to help Mr. Rufus Hicks with home healthcare for his dying wife Rose. At the age of fifty-five, she had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and he could not live with the idea of her living out her last days in a nursing home. On this day, Mr. Hicks had an early morning church meeting and had warned me on his way out the door that she was extremely tired from another one of her long nights. He wasted no time scurrying out to his Cadillac, and I had just finished hoisting Rose up from her beside toilet to wipe her when I heard the door slam shut.

Rose patted my back, reminding me that I had to be careful when using the medicated wipes because she had a rash. She gripped the back of my shirt and did not loosen it until I maneuvered her to the side of the bed, where I pulled the afghan over her head and then down her broad shoulders. After finding her arms in the sleeves, she stood up too quickly to get in her wheelchair, and if it were not for the bedpost, I probably would have been pinned under her until Mr. Hicks returned home.

**11:10a.m.:** As I wheeled Rose through the narrow hallway to park her in the center of the family room, I admired the wall photographs of younger versions of her and Mr. Hicks. I had realized at the point how much he had truly loved her, regardless of my notions that a few of those church meetings had nothing to do with his relationship and dedication to God. He had left the television on because he knew she enjoyed watching Bob Barker on the *Price is Right*. But I had not wanted her entranced by the midday shows and soap operas just yet because Rose would be my first honored audience for a new play script I had been working on.

**12:45p.m.:** Rose finally woke up after having consumed two tuna sandwiches and a large cup of iced lemon tea. I brushed up the final scene while she slept because even though this was my third play, it was my longest. This script was about the teenage frustrations of Karen, who was sexually promiscuous and socially uncouth because she craved the attention of parents struggling to remain a couple and this time around, my plan was to cast people from the community alongside my church members.

Rose averted her eyes away from Jill’s new love toy on *The Young and the Restless* when I went into a character voice befitting a 1960s Detroit-native teenage girl growing up in the ghetto. I performed the scene where Karen had slapped her mother and then called her father a two-timer because earlier in the script, she had seen him all over another woman in his car.

**12:56p.m.:** I had given Rose my best performance and had even acted out other characters in the play, but Rose just stared at me that day with indifferent bugged eyes as spittle seeped from the corner of her mouth. She gazed at the soap opera again and shifted in the wheelchair because Jill’s love scene had just ended. I sat back down on the couch, perturbed and insulted that she had not even attempted to smile the one side of her face I saw her do plenty of times before whenever contestants won a game on the *Price is Right*. I had not expected her to clap or even say anything because I knew she could not do either of those things but her unresponsiveness was almost like a revelation of all the future silent comments I would endure because of my writings. There was obviously nothing wrong with the dialectal style of this script, so I thought maybe she had critiqued my scene’s performance. I will admit even today that I am not the best actress.

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**August 30, 2010:** Retrospectively, if I had accepted Rose’s presage of agonizing years of creative privation that lay ahead of me, I would have saved myself many frustrated late nights and early mornings due to marked up essays and memoirs, drafts, revisions, and most importantly would have escaped those condescending noses of writing professors who revel in flogging me that I do not know nearly enough about the craft to mimic styles of admired distinguished writers who intentionally warp the rudiments of creative writing.

Anyway, it’s a good thing I was not provoked by the laughter that played around her grilling eyes that day nearly ten years ago because it is clearly obvious now that Rose knew nothing of my creative ability as an aspiring writer. She was an invalid.

Robin Wilson

Writer’s statement

A lot of my personal and bottled up feelings come out through my writings and I guess I finally wrote about my experience as Rose’s caretaker for her husband because for a long time, no one ever truly knew how bored I was and how much I missed my own family whenever I was over there. As a matter of fact, I just recently opened up about these specific experiences this past week.

Mr. Hicks, who is my husband’s grandfather, was and still is my pastor, and though I wasn’t really close to Rose, I felt compelled to help him so that he could continue pastoring the church. But at sometimes I felt used because as implicated in the memoir, I don’t think he was always at the church, leaving me to this day to only speculate his true whereabouts.

I wanted to invoke frustration and even a bit of shock when I spoke of Rose and her condition. But it was only because of the position I was pressured in as a writer. I mean where else could I have gotten my creative flow unless it was from the actual place that needled me which was the Hicks’ household.

I thought it’d be a good idea to write about this experience portrait memoir style so that I could capture specific incidents using a timeline. During the revision process, I changed the title at least three times, trying to figure out how could I convey to the reader that he or she should expect something about me not handling Rose’s response very well even though she couldn’t give me one in the first place. It was also very difficult for me to talk about the past as a present speaker, you know what I mean?

Did I succeed in making you at least a little uncomfortable at my response to Rose’s reaction? Did you have enough information to figure out what I think Mr. Hicks was doing while away sometimes? I’m pretty bad when it comes to wordiness. Was I that in this story?

Robin Wilson

Process Log

Monday evening 8/30: Ever since I pitched my three topics, a*s a caretaker of a woman diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, as a molested young girl,* or *as a person seeking monetary gains*, to Kathleen and the two visiting students, I’ve been excited about getting back into this groove of writing. It’s been a while for me even though I’ve been doing some script writing for a movie I’m working on. It feels good and I decided I will go with me as a caretaker of a Rose Hicks, my pastor’s wife.

Tuesday 8/31: It’s kind of hard figuring out how I want to depict the Hicks in this story because if I told the complete truth, then the reader may see my pastor in a negative light. But how else can I tell it? Maybe if I just show how quickly he leaves the house, it’ll only show his need for some time for himself. Then, how do I talk about the past from a present point of view? I think using I’m using ‘had’ too many times.

Wednesday 9/1: After reading the questions to my first draft, I’m finding that I’m confusing my readers about my relationship in this story and that I’m not expressing enough how Rose’s reaction impacted me as a fairly new writer. How can I stress these points without coming completely out and saying them?

Saturday 9/4: Thought about my procrastination and how it’s a part of me. But is it really, or am I just a procrastinator because I don’t do anything about it? Up late and chewing on this new title and how to stay in past tense. I like the television screen I added as Rose’s distraction to my acting performance. Juices going now and I’m glad I’ve stretched it from 1 ½ pages to 2 full pages without that filler stuff.

Wednesday 9/8: I answered Professor Fox’s questions about the story and like that it was ‘unusual’. Told Carl, my hubby, about it and he said that that was good. Got a few things to clear up but I don’t want to put too much of backstory into the story. Oh, the lady who sat two seats in front of me today told me she was one of the people who read my first draft and that it was on her mind. She also said she couldn’t wait to read the final piece! This is really good news for me.

Saturday 9/11: Gave some backstory in the writer’s statement and feel ok about it. Took me a while to say exactly what kind of impression I wanted to make on the reader but I know this wasn’t an easy piece to read.

Robin Wilson

Rough Draft

**Poor Evaluation**

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**11:10a.m.:** I parked Rose in the center of the family room after wheeling her through the narrow hallway that was covered with wall photographs of younger versions of her and Mr. Hicks. He had left the television on because he knew she enjoyed watching Bob Barker on the *Price is Right*. But I had not wanted her entranced by the midday shows and soap operas just yet because Rose would be my first honored audience for a new play script I had been working on.

**12:45p.m.:** Rose finally woke up after having eaten two tuna sandwiches. I brushed up the final scene while she slept because even though this was my third play, it was my longest, and because I had planned to cast volunteers from the community and not just my church members. I had been working on this script about the teenage frustrations of Karen, who was sexually promiscuous and socially uncouth because she craved the attention of parents struggling to remain a couple. Rose averted her eyes away from Jill’s new love toy on *The Young and the Restless* when I went into character with a voice befitting a 1960s Detroit-native teenage girl growing up in the ghetto. I performed the scene where Karen slapped her mother and then called her father a two-timer because earlier in the script, she had seen him all over another woman in his car.

**12:56p.m.:** I gave her my best performance, I even acted out other characters in the play, but Rose just stared at me that day with indifferent bugged eyes as spittle dropped from the corner of her mouth. I did not expect her to clap or even say anything because I knew she could not do either of those things. She gazed at the soap opera again and shifted in the wheelchair because Jill’s love scene had just ended. I sat back down on the couch, perturbed and insulted that she had not even attempted to smile the one side of her face I saw her do plenty of times before whenever contestants won a game on the *Price is Right*. Her unresponsiveness said it all and I did not need any more of her silent comments. There was obviously nothing wrong with the dialectal style of the script, so maybe she critiqued my scene’s performance. I admit I am not the best actress.

**August 30, 2010:** Retrospectively, if I had accepted Rose’s presage of years of agonizing creative privation that lay ahead of me, I would have saved myself years of frustration due to marked up essays and memoirs, drafts, revisions, condescending writing professors who revel in telling me that I do not know nearly enough about the craft to understand why distinguished writers are praised and adored when they intentional warp the rudiments and I get flogged when I commit an error. It’s a good thing I was not provoked by the laughter that played around her grilling eyes that day nearly ten years ago. It is obvious now that Rose knew nothing of my creative ability as an aspiring writer. She was an invalid.